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ABSTRACT

Described is the Man in a Changing Society (MIS) project in which K-12 Swedish children use parish records to study and research local history. Church records in Sweden contain detailed information about individuals living during the 18th and 19th centuries. To make this information accessible to researchers, the Swedish church records are being entered into a computerized demographic database. The records themselves are being stored in regional and city archives; they are also being transferred onto microcards. Students, with help from their teachers, choose topics to research, e.g., an overall picture of childhood in the 19th century, an investigation of family history and a compilation of family trees, a time strip for the local community. Using school-based computer terminals, students tap into the demographic database, usually available at a nearby university. MIS project staff are also conducting research on pupils' intellectual and conceptual development with regard to the concepts of time and space and students' use of information technology to study man in a changing society. (RM)

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SCHOOL RESEARCH Newsletter

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MAY 1985 FIELD - TOPIC 1985:5

Research
History
Computers
Curricula

CURRENT PROJECT

TITLE OF PROJECT: MAN IN A CHANGING SOCIETY - MIS

Can pupils develop a learning process? Can they "conquer" history so as to learn from past social change in order to contribute towards social change in the present and future? What part can unique source material represented by parish records play in the compilation of a "history of the common people" and in a learning process?

Where does information technology come into all this?

Big questions and Utopian prospects? May be, but they occupy a prominent position in the MIS project.

PROJECT IN PROGRESS AT: Demografiska databasen
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SCIENTIFIC LEADER: Egil Johansson

PROJECT TEAM: Bengt Grensjö
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PROJECT NO.: 6305

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NEWSLETTER 1980 - 1985

1980:1 Pupils' thinking and course requirements in science teaching (EKNA)
1980:2 Marks and assessments in school
1980:3 Continuous admissions at AMU centres (SINAMU)
1980:4 Follow-up of school management training (USU)
1980:5 Special pedagogics in pre-school education (SIF)
1980:6 Problem-oriented co-operation between teachers, pupils and parents (POSLEF)
1980:7 List of Projects 1980/81
1980:8 Evaluation of an experimental SYO organization
1980:9 Models for the bilingual instruction of immigrant children

1981:1 Integration of the profoundly deaf and severely hearing impaired in ordinary classes
1981:2 The PANG Project. Process Analysis on Non-Grading
1981:3 Preconditions of change in schools (FISK)
1981:4 Social segregation in comprehensive schools in Sweden
1981:5 H.G. Macintosh. Report on a visit to Sweden
1981:6 Learning problems of junior level children - a Nordic joint research project
1981:7 Needs-oriented language learning for adults (BISVUX)
1981:8 List of Project 1981/82
1981:9 Teaching processes - world conception and Educational Vocational Guidance (SIA-SYO)
1981:10 Swedish science subjects in an international perspective: curriculum, teachers and pupils (SNILLE)

1982:1 Basic skills in a longterm perspective (BAS)
1982:2 Sign language and the learning of Swedish by deaf children (Project TSD)
1982:3 Preparedness for the future as an educational objective in upper secondary school
1982:4 Maturity levels and selfperception (MOS)
1982:5 Pupils' thinking and course requirements in science teaching (EKNA)
1982:6 Children in Group Day Care and Family care. A longitudinal study of children with different child care experiences

1983:1 Evaluation of Courses of Study at Upper Secondary School (UTGY)
1983:2 The Research Programme of The National Swedish Board of Education
1983:3 Science Subjects - An Evaluation of Student Achievement and Attitudes in International Perspective (IEA Science II)
1983:4 Evaluation through follow-up of students (UGU)
1983:5 Analysis of teacher-directed experimentation

1984:1 Children with early perceptual functional disturbances. A follow-up during school years
1984:2 The SIAu Project: Project description
1984:3 Transition from compulsory and upper secondary school to further education or employment - the GUARANTEE project
1984:4 Vertical integration at junior and intermediate levels
1984:5 Learning to read
1984:6 Family support and development - a longitudinal, ecological study of families with children of pre-school and junior-level age (the FAST-Project)
1984:7 Study assistance and adult study assistance - utilisation and effects
1984:8 UTRES - Evaluation of resource utilisation in upper secondary schools
1984:9 MEDIA PANEL

1985:1 Creativity and communication: music and art education - The KROK-projekt
1985:2 Children's participation at junior level
1985:3 Programme for recurrent educational situation reports: school description models
1985:4 Discovery learning and cognitive development - the UKU-projekt

The R&D project "Man in a Changing Society" (MIS) began in the 1982/83 school year and will be continuing for five years up to and including 1986/87. The project originated in the course of research into the history of education at the University of Umeå and also from the extensive processing of parish records which has been going on for more than 10 years now at the Demographic Database in Härnösand-Umeå. The latter also includes the production of microfiche parish records by SVAR (Swedish Archive Information) in Ramsele, which began in 1983. A detailed background description is essential in order for the character of the project to be made quite clear to the reader.

What the parish records tell us

All of us today are included in the records of parochial civil registration offices. The history of those records can be traced all the way back to the early 17th century. In 1608, Archbishop Olaus Martini ordered the clergy to keep records of baptisms, marriages and betrothals. This order was sporadically complied with.

As a result of the Reformation, Martin Luther's Short Catechism became the national ABC book in Sweden. People were now to read the word of God for themselves. This came as a challenge to the prevailing Latin exegesis. The Catechism became the fulcrum of a literacy campaign headed by the clergy. The results of this campaign were recorded in special rolls in connection with the annual examinations on the Catechism. One by one, the parishioners were noted down together with their knowledge of Christianity.

Church records were standardised through the 1686 Ecclesiastical Law. They were now made to include more details concerning the individual. As a result, we are now in a good position to find out about individual persons throughout the entire 18th and 19th centuries. Equally detailed records are also available in Finland. The house examination rolls are most detailed of all. Special rolls were drawn up to record births and baptisms, marriages, migration to or from a parish, and deaths and burials.

Parish records contain abundant information about individual people living in Sweden over the centuries. As research material, those records can shed light on various aspects of human life. In recent years, several research publications have drawn on parish records as a source of information concerning such matters as the historical development of literacy, emigration, infant mortality, the ravages of tuberculosis down to the present age, and hereditary diseases, to mention but a few examples.

Parish records have been consulted by individual scholars, family genealogists and authors in all ages. But the development of computer technology caused the research community to focus new attention on the mass information which parish records have to offer. The then Curate of Robertsfors embarked in the mid-1960s on a research project concerning the development of literacy. The first tables were compiled at the vicarage. Before long, though, these inquiries were transferred to the Department of Education at the new University of Umeå. Consequently education research was involved from the very beginning in this encounter between parish records and computer technology.

Following the example of literacy research, the current interests of archives, other universities and employment authorities were grouped together in a more general process of computerising parish records for archival, educational and research purposes. The Haparanda-Umeå Demographic Database was established for this purpose. Seven 19th century parishes representing a variety of environments throughout the country were selected for this, the first modern historical research laboratory, in which information technology enables the mind of the researcher to travel in both time and space. The Demographic Database was established in 1973. Today it employs a total of 120 people in production work in Haparanda, Pajala, Jokkmokk and Jörn. And the first research laboratory, comprising the seven parishes, is now complete. Meantime, work is in progress on three larger areas (the Sundsvall, Skellefteå and Linköping regions). Their 19th century parishes (and, for Skellefteå, the 18th century parishes too) are now being processed by and for information technology.

Thus the Demographic Database throws a small proportion of Sweden's 19th century parishes into sharp relief, thus rationalising the most time-consuming part of research work, i.e. excerpting sources. This leaves more time, for example, for closer reading of the relevant research literature and for the actual business of analysis and cogitation. The data material, however, is no substitute for the researcher's encounter with the sources. To interpret the data, one must know their context and their relevance in the world of the sources, the abundance of which cannot be reduced to strictly technical and system-logical criteria.

The parish records are stored and looked after in the seven regional archives and in the city archives of Stockholm and Malmö. In recent years work has begun on transferring the microfilms of parish record spreads to microcards, i.e. plastic-encased, postcard format sheets holding about 50 parish record spreads in reduced format. These sheets are read in special apparatus. The microcard work is being done by SVAR. Within a few years, all parish records in Sweden will have been transferred to this medium, which is an excellent means of bringing research material closer to research, wherever it is being conducted and whatever the field it refers to. Through the work done by SVAR, all parish records from the oldest-surviving documents down to the last turn of the century are being transferred to microcards. The material for the whole of northern Sweden (except the County of Gävleborg) and for the Counties of Kopparberg, Kronoberg and Gotland is already complete. Within just a few years, every school will be able to consult the SVAR material for information about its own community and local history. In addition, it will also be possible for other material to be filmed and offered together with material from population records in tailor-made packages for each individual school.

Man in a Changing Society

MIS is a research and development project. Development work has predominated during the initial period and is being conducted by the project team, who are affiliated to the University, in collaboration with teachers and other school staff. This produces an encounter

between two poles of knowledge, representing the University and the school sector respectively. The first of these poles mainly contributes knowledge about the research process, historical studies, sources, modern techniques, and educational and psychological processes. The other pole, comprising the pupils, teachers and other school staff taking part in the project, is closely familiar with learning, teaching and the practicalities of school work. This encounter generates the tangible content of the project, which varies from one class, age level and school district to another.

The development work included in MIS has resulted among other things in the actual school routines which the participating classes have developed. This can be termed a semi-spontaneous process, with the University presenting a selection and the classes deciding what teacher and pupils are to concentrate on. Glimpses of this practical process will be presented below.

The world of the parish records makes it possible to describe history in such a way that the individual protagonists (rather laxly, this can be termed the "history of the common people") can be seen through the main events in their lives, at the same time as the source information provides unique social statistics which can be used in studying structural aspects of our national development. Within the MIS project, parish records are the main source material on local history used by school children in their research. In addition to this material, use is also made of all other sources on local history which can help to flesh out the general picture of the development of the surrounding community. These materials include the spoken recollections of elderly people living today. They also include such relics as pictures, letters and buildings. Written records consulted include, for example, maps, estate inventories, school records and workplace materials.

MIS comes from an educational-historical research environment of which it forms part. At the same time it is housed with the Demographic Database, in which modern computer science is combined with extensive interdisciplinary competence. The human sciences constitute natural reference environments for the MIS project.

Given these roots, it is natural that MIS in the school community should be mainly concerned with testing an investigative working approach as a method for learning. The very fact of parish records being an historically abundant and easily accessible index makes them ideal research material for use in schools. The pupils can ascertain facts and draw conclusions which have not previously been presented in books and articles. In this sense pupils and teachers can conduct their own research.

So far during the first three years of the project, its research environments have developed and come into being gradually. During this, the third school year, experiments are taking place in the Municipalities of Sundsvall, Timrå and Umeå. These experimental environments comprise a number of classes at the intermediate and senior levels of compulsory school and in upper secondary school, together with their teachers. As from the next school year, 1985/86, the experiments will also include a couple of classes at the junior level of compulsory school.

Work began in the Sundsvall area because, as explained earlier, the Demographic Database is processing 19th century parish records from this area. Tuna had already been included as one of the first seven parishes in the database. When the project was being planned, it was imagined that the 15 parishes in the area would be completely processed and that information technology would also make them readily available for research in the school sector.

We are still waiting for the Sundsvall material to become fully available from the database. This has in fact been postponed to such an extent that the real MIS project will be concluded beforehand.

MIS started as planned in the Sundsvall area. The content of the experiments had to be achieved by other means. In the school environments, local history research began with the aid of parish records and other sources. The computer applications had to wait. The material from the Demographic Database (the Parish of Tuna) was tested, however, in a number of senior level classes which logged into the University

mainframe from their terminals. Working at these terminals, the pupils could group the inhabitants of Tuna according to various categories (e.g. all emigrants to North America) and then study the individuals in the group thus formed (e.g. with reference to birth, family, occupation, marriage, migration and marks awarded). These techniques opened up fascinating opportunities of inquiry but proved to be immensely expensive. MIS could not sustain the financial burden of continuing the on-line experiments in these technical forms.

At the same time as SVAR began transferring all Swedish parish records to microcard, as explained above, microcomputer developments in schools began to move very fast. Within MIS ideas were developed concerning ways of transferring parish record material to microcomputer memories and using them as ingredients for the children's research, partly on the basis of ideas similar to those originally underlying the establishment of the Demographic Database. With these new conditions, MIS was no longer confined to the parish of Tuna in the Sundsvall area, nor was it reduced to waiting for material from the other parishes to be completed. Instead the Municipality of Umeå could be used as a supplementary research environment. From a microcomputer viewpoint, which represents only part of the MIS project, the Umeå experiments were typical of school conditions throughout the country. In this way MIS acquired a more general character.

Research in progress

For MIS purposes, research is a variegated concept which can be viewed in at least four terms:

1. The research done by teachers and pupils in the classroom.

2. Research done by the project team concerning these experiments and their conditions.

3. Research into the pupils' intellectual and conceptual development with regard to such concepts as time and space.

4. Research and development to test natural ways for the children to utilise modern techniques, especially information technology, in developing their knowledge of man in a changing society.

The specific content of the children's research is shaped by the teachers, who know more than anybody else about the children and local conditions. This in turn has made the research environments extremely variegated. Despite variations at practical level, there is a common content on a more general plane. We can begin by considering the example of a couple of intermediate level classes. One of them is located in Matfors (Tuna), a relatively quiet and stable community and today the centre of an area with a long history. The other class is in Bredsand, which in many respects is the opposite of Matfors. These children do not have such an obvious home area. Their family circumstances are a good deal less secure, and going back a few generations in time one finds a picture which is no less incoherent.

In both cases the teachers have taken the children and their experiences as the starting point. In Matfors priority was given to the task of conquering time. The journey back began with questions taken home to father and mother. First there were demographic data to be collected, and then eventually questions of a more ethnological nature were asked so as to construct an overall picture of parental childhood during the 1940s. After a few such rounds of questioning, the scope of the inquiry was broadened to include Matfors and, eventually, the entire country during the 1940s. This led to the conquest of space in an increasingly broad sense. After several rounds of questions and reports, an average (collective) picture was outlined of the individual "journeys" in time and space. This picture evolved in the form of posters on the classroom walls.

The next step was to conquer first time and then space in the 1920s. Questions were now put to grandparents, and then extended to take in the local community and the country as a whole. The stage which then began proceeds by way of parish records and other documents on local history. Longer chronological perspectives now become visible.

In Bredsand, priority was given to the conquest of space. The children were to acquire a home area. The local community was the point of departure. The children compiled a map and plotted their journeys to and from school. Between home and school they passed by buildings with histories of their own, e.g. what used to be an upper-class bathing establishment at the close of the 19th century, the local co-op, the remains of a sawmill and so on. Time was conquered by asking pensioners into the classroom to describe home life, school life, working life and leisure activities in times gone by. As the children became intellectually capable of moving further back in time, parish records, school records and industrial archives were drawn on for descriptions of life in the local community during another period.

An MIS model, based on the experiences of classes in various schools, has been evolved for work at intermediate level. The standard variant goes like this. Grade 4 studies "our family", with the children investigating their family history and compiling family trees. In grade 5 they go on to interview their grandparents and construct a "time strip" for the locality, Sweden and the world. In grade 6 they continue their journey back in time. The 19th century is conquered with the aid of parish records (through the medium of microcards and computers).

This "MIS model for intermediate level" was not preconceived. It has evolved as a result of nearly three years' practical experience in several classes (thereby supplying the context which the project environment implies). The essential thing is that it emanates from the pupils' personal history and moves backwards in time from the present (to parents' times, grandparents' times and the 19th century) and outwards (from "our family" to the local community, going on from there to Sweden and the world at large). In one way this model complies with the instructions in the compulsory school curricular, Lgr 80, from "My own history" via "The history of my family" to "The history of my locality", but in another respect it is quite contradictory (since history is learned from the present backwards).

In the senior level and upper secondary school classes, the research done by pupils and teachers has to a great extent been based on the written sources, especially parish records. Deliberate efforts have been made to concentrate on the same topics of inquiry and the same sources as relevant university researchers (literacy, emigration, infant mortality, tuberculosis, family life etc.). The children have investigated the same phenomena, but with reference to their local community. To back up this research, relevant university researchers have been invited to attend MIS project research seminars at the schools taking part in the experiment. This has made the children members of a wider research community.

Another important problem with which MIS is concerned is that of elucidating the development of children's and young persons' thoughts about time and space between different ages. The initial premise, in accordance with the theories of developmental psychology and the teachers' professional experience, is that children and, to some extent, young persons are dependent on their own time and age (contemporaneity, being a child or adolescent) and on their own experience from a specific geographical and social space (the geographical space being the local community in their own time and the social space mainly comprising their own family's social position). Starting from this point there is an incipient emancipation of thought which facilitates thinking about other periods (both backwards and forwards in time), empathy with other ages, and thoughts about other geographical and social conditions. In the course of this project a study is being made of the possibilities of teaching with an investigative approach and based partly on parish records supporting this emancipation of thought.

Computer techniques are being studied within MIS mainly as a form of development work. Mention has already been made of the expensive on-line experiments using the ready-made material of the Demographic Database. MIS is also testing the same material in two other, economical forms. One variant is to define sub-batches of data from the various parishes in the Demographic Database and to transfer them to the school microcomputers. A species of experimental material is being tested this school year which contains data concerning couples who

married during the first and second halves of the 19th century and seven different types of surroundings. These data include size of family, number of children, ages, occupations, marks etc. The experimental material is stored on floppy disks, these data being combined with program packages developed within the MIS project. The resultant teaching kit will make it possible to describe and analyse data in various ways in order to develop a knowledge of social change in the 19th century.

Similarly, a very large number of research tasks can be defined and data extracted from the ready-made material of the Demographic Database. Emigration, literacy, migration patterns and social change can be mentioned as examples. Data from the database can be infinitely supplemented by data from other sources. It is possible for individualised data to be added to the existing personal items in the school computer memories, and supplementary material can of course be provided through other media (pictures, microcards, paper documents etc.).

Egil Johansson, acting in collaboration with MIS, has developed a microcomputer software package which can be used to study people in church at the beginning of the 19th century. Since church seating arrangements at that time reflected the social structure of the community, the computers can help us to gain a knowledge of our cultural past as regards both individuals and statistical demographic averages.

Development work is also in progress to enable schools anywhere in the country to build up their own local history databases. The technology is being taken from the Demographic Database, the data from the SVAR microcards, and the programs and working methods are being developed and tested as part of the MIS project.

Both these last mentioned microcomputer development projects are being presented as teaching materials complete with introductory text, software and data.

As schools become more proficient in programming, teachers are also becoming involved in computer development work. For example, we have

programs capturing official population statistics from 1749 to 1859. Data can be extracted from these sources and then presented, for example, in the form of annual charts concerning causes of death, numbers of births, population ages etc.

Summing up, information technology has come to play quite a limited part within the MIS project. It is a feature of research work in classrooms here and there, but never a dominant method. This is because it requires a close knowledge of the sources and because the interpretive phases of research are expected to continue beyond the data obtainable from the school computer. At the same time we have noticed that computer science work applied to our local history material has had cognitive effects of a more general nature. One inevitably picks up a fair amount of basic computer science concerning the preparation of real material for entry into the computer memory and subsequent processing. In this way the potential applications of computer science are made part of a natural educational and cognitive context.

Half way

The MIS project passed its half way mark at the New Year 1985. The project has created a variable research environment. The interest shown by one teacher category after another has occasioned continuous reports on the experiment in a special project bulletin. In some places co-operation has been established with teachers and children not belonging to the real research environment. For example, two intermediate level classes in the Municipality of Haparanda have done excellent research work using material from the Demographic Database there.

The combination of research and development project represented by MIS has led to highly constructive co-operation between local education authorities and teachers involved in the project. Development work and practical construction have dominated the first half of MIS. These elements are instrumental in shaping the concrete history of the project. The aim for the second half is to retain this openness, but

at the same time to research in greater depth. One particular aim is to find out about the pupils' intellectual aptitudes and involvement in ongoing classroom research based on local history sources and with elements of computer science.

Groups of parents have become spontaneously involved in the work of the MIS project. In some schools parents and children together have worked on the MIS ideas during their spare time. There have also been cases of groups of parents coming to the project team for advice on how to set about studying history on the spot together with their children and perhaps eventually involving the children's teachers as well. Parents have an important part to play in school work and, with their experience, are in a good position to help broaden the children's ideas of space and time. During the remainder of the MIS project, greater attention will be paid to parents and their possible participation. The Compulsory School Curriculum refers to "school as a cultural centre". From time to time this concept is made unusually tangible by the current practical activities of the MIS project.

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